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MEMORIAL ADDRESS

Col. Thomas Wallace Knox

DELIVERED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF

THE LOTOS CLUB

APRIL 6, 1896.

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a.m.e. Jan. 6, 1926.

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In the ceaseless struggle of mankind for the life of others there can be no loftier aspiration than that which is created by a desire to contribute to their intellectual profit or pleasure, and there is no nobler pursuit than that of an author whose works continue to bring sunshine to our households long after he has passed away. This was the ambition and hope that impelled and guided the tireless pen of our late, lamented friend and fellow member, Colonel Thomas Wallace Knox.

Only a few days before he died he said to me, "I know that after I am dead and forgotten my books will live." And here is the key-note—sadly sounding down the avenues of time—of every grand endeavor. Conscious genius lifts her laureled brow and, unmindful of her chaplets, thinks only of her darling gifts to the world, wondering whether they will be treasured as blessed legacies. And

how many who have toiled and struggled and hoped, not alone for recognition while living, but for the assurance of something imperishable "when life's fitful fever is over," have been forgotten and their books buried in the sands of oblivion.

But if in this age the principles of altruism shall ultimately predominate over that spirit of avarice which Tennyson describes as "Each hand lusting for all that is not its own," then the man who adds one item to the fund of human knowledge will rise to the highest dignity that can be attained in the great scale of being. Then the names of men who seemed to be illustrious while living may be forgotten, the splendid temples reared and adorned by human hands may perish, the monuments erected to perpetuate the memory of those who achieved renown may crumble into dust; but the magic forms of beauty created out of the airy fabric of the brain and the "thoughts that breathe and words that burn" will survive the wreck of time.

The life and personality of Colonel Knox were altogether unique, and were the outgrowth of those phenomenal opportunities afforded by American civilization and American institutions. Born in a little village of New Hampshire, of parents who were the descendants of stalwart, old John Knox, the Scottish Reformer, and noted for their rigid conservatism, in

early life he found his way to Boston, where the trammels of Puritanism which had fettered his early childhood were broken and a larger liberty of thought and action secured. There he studied with all the ardor of the most ambitious student, until he was enabled to impart to others the attainments of his unwearied scholarship; so that when he was only eighteen years of age he became the teacher of others who were older than himself. Before he was twenty-two years of age he established an academy at Kingston, N. H., but adverse circumstances forced him to relinquish the enterprise, and when the alluring rumors of newly-discovered fields of fabulous wealth in Colorado reached him, he gathered up the few dollars he had saved and counting the cost decided to journey thither. On his arrival at Denver he discovered that his exchequer was sadly depleted and it became necessary to seek employment, which he soon obtained, as a special reporter of the Denver *Daily News*, and subsequently, while thus engaged, he also became the western correspondent of a number of eastern journals.

At the outbreak of the war he was amongst the first in the field, and served in the Army of the Southwest as a volunteer aide. Subsequently he was appointed Lieutenant-Colonel and Aide-de-Camp on the staff of the Commander-in-Chief of the National Guard of

California by Governor Frederick F. Lane. When not on duty he was busy with his facile pen, and his graphic accounts of long and weary marches, skirmishes and battle-scenes, won for him the high regard of newspaper men in this and other eastern cities. At the close of the war he came to New York and soon after made his first journey around the world, writing vivid descriptions for the press of his visit to eastern lands. Subsequently he made frequent trips to other foreign countries and traversed nearly every known region of the earth. He had travelled many thousands of miles more than Bayard Taylor, and, with the single exception of Frank Vincent, more than any other noted American.

It was during one of his periodical tours (in 1877) that he reached the shores of Siam, and in that unfrequented and far-off corner of the world he was my guest for several weeks, visiting the palaces of royalty and the bungalows of the lowly, the gorgeous temples of the Buddhists and the humble chapels of the missionaries. We travelled together through the jungles many miles in the interior of the country by elephants and bullock-carts and native boats.

Just before his departure for Singapore I had the pleasure of presenting him to the King, and as he was the only American His

Majesty had seen for several years, except the official representatives of our Government, and the Presbyterian missionaries, he invited us to his summer palace at Bang-pa-in, where we remained nearly an entire day and fully half a night together, enjoying all the luxuries that an Oriental sovereign could furnish to his guests, and conversing in a familiar manner upon subjects of general interest. On this occasion Colonel Knox explained with great care and in detail the methods and operations of our educational institutions, which greatly interested the King, and two years later it was a source of more than ordinary gratification to me to be permitted to inform the Department of State that His Majesty had inaugurated a system of public instruction predicated largely on the lines which Colonel Knox had suggested. A few weeks after my good friend's departure, His Majesty remarked to me: "If all Americans were like Colonel Knox what a splendid race you would have in your country."

The works that Colonel Knox has left us, especially his series of "Boy Travellers," are monuments of his industrious research and wide experience. His pen was not skilled in the art of portraying the plastic imagery of fancy's enchanted landscape. He saw things as they were, and painted them as he saw them, and made, as Robert Louis Stevenson said, "the

right kind of thing fall out in the right kind of place; the right kind of thing follow, and not only the characters talk aptly and think naturally, but all the circumstances answer one to another like the notes in music." If he appeared at times to indulge at all in exaggeration it was because the scene he depicted was made up of a multiplication of anomalous and incongruous forms and figures, but not less faithfully portrayed because so seemingly unreal, as things often seem to those who are unfamiliar with untraveled countries.

It may be said of his writings that they are characterised by a fascinating simplicity of style, a purity of diction, and an unaffected tenderness of thought; and he might have truthfully said of himself, as did the author of the "Pleasures of Hope," during his last days on earth: "When I am gone, justice will be done to me in this way: it will be said that I was a pure writer, and now it is an inexpressible comfort to me to be able to look back and feel that I have not written one line against religion or virtue."

His sterling traits of character and predilections have been accurately and admirably portrayed by his old and intimate friend, Junius Henri Browne, who says:

"He was a true son of New England, and American through and through; in the best sense of the word a Democrat, a man without

the least pretense or affectation, a believer in hard work and honest purpose. No man has ever been more strictly, more absolutely just. It is not too much to say that he was the embodiment of justice in every act of his checkered career. He had often said that if all men were just, there would be no need of generosity, which is only made necessary in order to supply the deficiencies of what assumes to be justice, and is exactly the opposite.

"He was an unflinching believer in law and order.

"Exceedingly conservative and practical, he had no love of theory, no fondness for speculation, no care to solve problems of any sort. He revered facts, and of them he was always an ardent supporter. Very patient with the existing order of things, for whose original existence he thought there must have been entirely sound reason, he could have lived in a despotism with a certain degree of contentment, fervid lover of liberty though he was. If he had not been able to endure the despotism, he would have gone elsewhere, rather than plot against it, or attempt its overthrow.

"Many of Colonel Knox's acquaintances failed to understand him, he was so invariably upright, so uncompromising as to what he considered to be right. He sometimes gave offence, no doubt, by saying precisely what he be-

lieved; and yet he was uniformly polite when politeness did not involve falsehood or some other form of insincerity. He would never ask any person to do anything for him that he would not gladly do for that person. He never paid idle compliments; he never flattered; he never had ulterior motives; he was ever frank, direct, trustworthy. He was never known to borrow money, though he would frequently lend to anyone he esteemed to be honest. But he detested, from the bottom of his soul, any man who could in any manner be suspected of 'dead-beatism.' Of his charities he seldom spoke, and they were many and constant. He would always give, according to his means, to any person or cause that was needy and deserving.

"His books were like himself, wholly honest and painstaking, simple and straightforward. In a literary way, he had made the most of himself, and he was quietly proud of what he had accomplished by untiring industry, patient research, extreme conscientiousness and unquestionable talent. Character, however, was his sovereign distinction. He was a model American, a pattern for the rising generation.

"If every citizen of the country were all that he was, this would be an ideal Republic."

Colonel Knox was a true Lotosian in all that the word implies. His club was his castle that he was always ready to protect and

defend. He was a member of other clubs, but the Lotos was his favorite abiding place, to which he clung with a feeling of fondness somewhat akin to that which home alone inspires. He was one of its constituent members, and for several years at different periods performed the duties of vice-president and secretary, devoting considerable time to its interests. And now, as we no longer behold his kindly face in the old familiar places, our thoughts instinctively turn towards the mysterious, unknown realms of the departed, and we are led to exclaim in the language of Longfellow:

"Traveller! in what realms afar,
In what planet, in what star,
In what vast, aerial space
Shines the light upon thy face?
In what gardens of delight,
Rest thy weary feet to-night?"

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